

University of Groningen

Autism in females and males

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Elucidating Female AutiSm Study (EmFASiS): Preliminary results of a qualitative study.

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Aim

To understand the female autism phenotype.



Background

Recent research in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) shows females are more often affected than previously assumed. Compared to males, females seem to show and experience a different symptom-profile. Late recognition of autism in females often leads to increased and/or prolonged individual distress, decreased societal participation, and emergence of comorbidity.

Methods

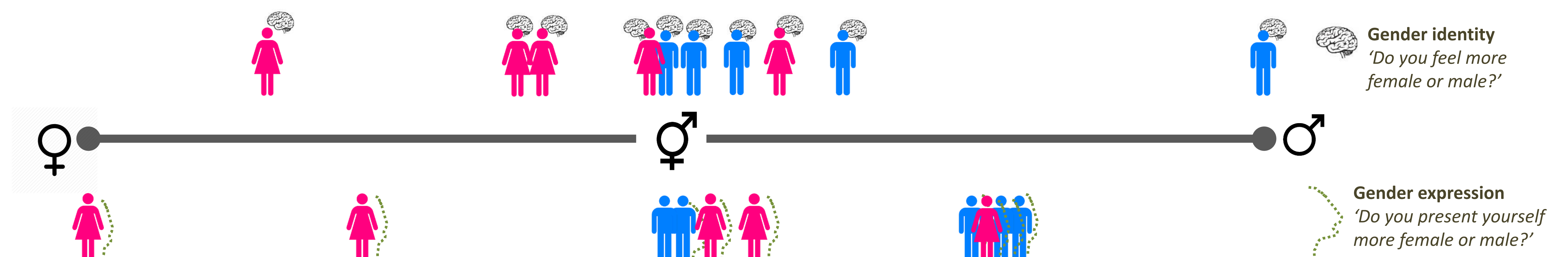
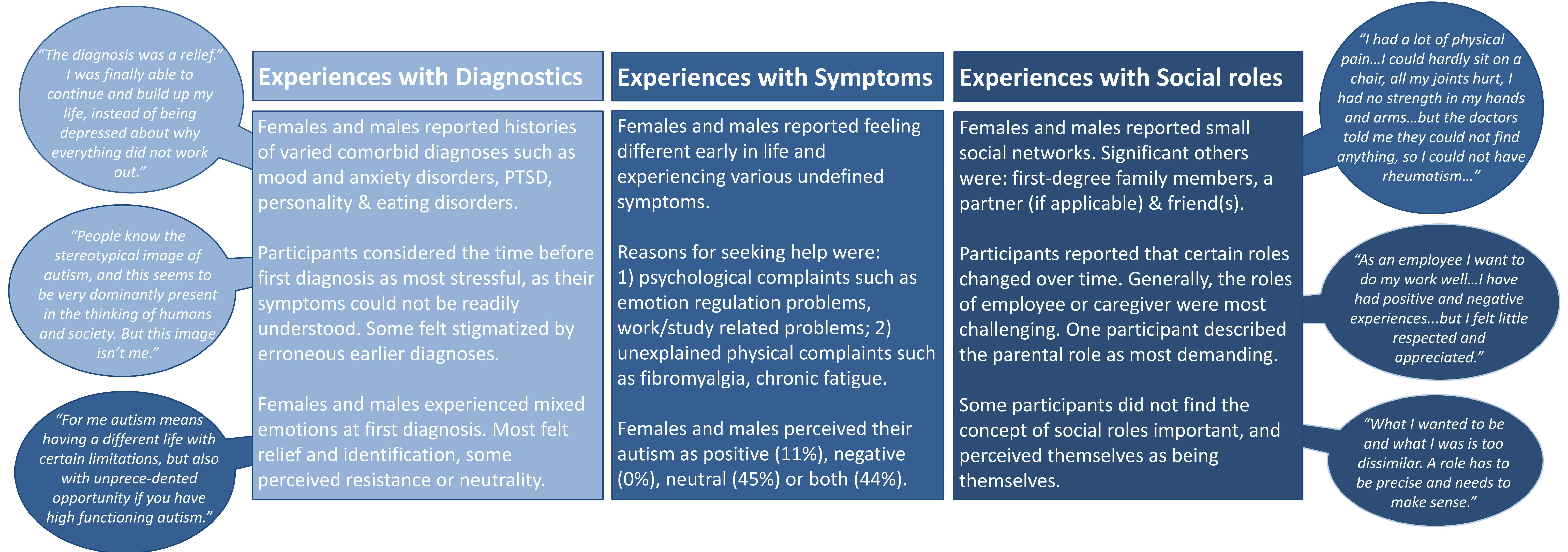
- A qualitative study design using face-to-face semi-structured interviews.
- An interview guide was developed with service-users, clinicians, and researchers, which
- It covers three key themes: experiences with (1) diagnostic process and treatment (2) ASD symptom presentation (3) social roles.
- Audio-recorded and verbatim-transcribed.
- Inclusion criteria: ≥ 18 years, formal ASD diagnosis.
- Aim: $n = 30$ adults with autism, data collection is ongoing.

Preliminary results

Demographics

Current sample size is $N=10$ ($n=5$ females; $n=5$ males).

Mean age was 39.8 years (range 27-60; SD 10.4) and mean age at first diagnosis was 34.6 years (range 26-57; SD 11.1).



Preliminary conclusion

- Females and males generally reported similar symptoms but of varying severity. Both females and males had a history of erroneous previous diagnoses and were all diagnosed with ASD in (early) adulthood. Some participants had suspected for a long time that their symptoms might be related to autism, whereas others had not and were surprised by the diagnosis.
- Most participants reported fairly neutral gender identities, while gender expression was more varied.
- Females reported more societal and intrinsic pressure regarding social skills. Males' attitudes towards societal expectations were more autonomous.

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